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**RESEARCH ON *XENOPHOBIC* EVENTS FACED BY ZIMBABWEAN
IMMIGRANTS-DEPORTEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS (South Africa and
Botswana)**

Introduction

Since, the beginning of the political and economical crisis in Zimbabwe an estimated 4.5 million people have involuntarily left their beloved country in search of personal security, jobs both of which have become an unforgettable illusion back home. Europe, America and the SADC countries have become hosts to these fleeing immigrants of professional and non-professionals. The economic and political meltdown is the main motivation and human rights harassment led them to seek political asylum outside their borders. Now, the exodus is uncontrollable and unstoppable as these would-be immigrants use every available and loopholes to skip the borders.

The Human Rights Commissions have dismally failed to fund and communicate with the CSOs which are directly involved with the grassroots immigrants who are terribly affect with Xenophobia .

The Situation

Stringent and harsh immigration visa and passport controls have not reduced the exodus in anyway. Xenophobia, especially in SADC and other European states has manifested itself with impunity. The immigrants and deportation crisis of Zimbabweans has really become a serious social threat to SA and Zimbabwe and it has over spilled and of recent to Mozambique with 400 000, Botswana 700 000, Zambia 300 000, Malawi 100 000, Namibia 100 000, South Africa 2.5million, UK 500 000 elsewhere 200 000

**Account of Xenophobic events faced by Zimbabwe Deportees/immigrants
(South Africa-B Botswana)**

- 1.** Sexual assaults in front of relatives, friends, husband or wives by The Youth Militia and Zimbabwe secret agents.
- 2.** Border jumpers/Deportees have their clothes, shoes and other valuable possessions i.e. cell phones and Rands taken by Guma-Gumas and South African and Zimbabwe security officials and Youth Militia before and after crossing.
- 3.** Border jumpers are made to walk four to five hours at a very high speed without resting and entering through dangerous razor and barbed fence.

4. If a Deportee/Border jumper coughs he or she can face manhandling or even being seriously beaten for that.
5. Border jumpers also claim to come across ghosts at night (which has a negative effect in life culturally) which they claim sometimes traumatises them during their sleeps.
6. Some Border jumpers/Deportees said they were drugged stripped of their possessions and clothes and left for dead by Guma- Gumas and Zimbabwe secret agents working hand in hand with SA police along the Petersburg Messina highway. They were taken to Petersburg Hospital where they were partially treated and deported in an unconscious state.
7. Farmers in the Limpopo Province are also mercilessly capitalising on desperate Border jumpers by enslaving them, paying them R170 per month or in most cases calling the police to arrest them on month end.
8. 20/06/04 five middle-aged Zimbabwean (Border jumpers), men and girls were drowned while wading across the Crocodile infested Limpopo River on their way to South Africa----South African Divers retrieved their bodies from the feasting crocodiles.
9. 10/05/04. Polokwane police divers and police searched the Northern Limpop river and retrieved 9 nine decomposed bodies of Zimbabwe border jumpers believed to have been either shot or mauled by crocodiles.
10. 2003. Lindela Detention Centre rioted against bad conditions –many Zimbabwean deportees were injured and hospitalised.
11. 2003. Three Lindela inmates from Zimbabwe died of food poisoning.
12. 2003. 15 Zimbabwean detainees were hospitalised after Lindela inmates ran amok and clashed with authorities over the long delay in repatriation-3-5weeks had become unbearable for them.
13. Sep 2004. Five Lindela, Zimbabwean detainees died under unexplained circumstances/diarrhoea, coughing, poisoning has not been ruled out.
14. Seven Zimbabwean Deportees on the Messina bound train died when they tried to jump from the moving train after paying bribes to the security officials on the train.
15. Three seriously ill Zimbabwean Deportees died on the Messina/Beit-bridge bound train.
16. Infants are also detained in Lindela Holding Centre awaiting deportation.

17. A stillborn baby was delivered in a Gumba-Kumba by an arrested/illegal Zimbabwean immigrant after the police assaulted her.
18. Nineteen Blind Zimbabwean Asylum Seekers detained at Lindela Holding Camp without handlers.
19. Several half-naked Zimbabwe immigrants were arrested by the police in their sleep (in Hillbrow, Berea, Yeoville and Alexandra).
20. Nine pregnant Zimbabwean immigrants in Lindela complained to Lawyers for Human Rights for harsh conditions and deportation delay process.
21. A 20year old arrested immigrant from Zimbabwe reported to authorities of how he was robbed of his cell phone, R700, a watch and cap.
22. Xenophobic police officers in Alexandra Township arrested 23 Zimbabwean immigrants during a Church Service.
23. 11-targeted Zimbabwean immigrants from an informal settlement lost all their property after being attacked and their houses torched by unknown people.
24. Five Zimbabwean immigrants were arrested at a Crèche while collecting their children from Hillbrow.
25. Xenophobic police raid restaurants and arrest Zimbabwean immigrant workers.
26. Asylum permit holders face constant harassment, arrests and made to pay bribes to avoid deportation.
27. 20/10/04. Botswana govt publicly announced that 25 000 immigrants aliens enter their country monthly.
28. Zambian prostitutes in Livingston running a fierce battle with the Zimbabwean immigrants counterparts over male customers and marketing sovereignty.
29. 19/8/04. 8 deported female Zimbabwean immigrants from Botswana are declared HIV/AIDS positive in Bulawayo Mpilo Hospital.
30. Hordes of resented Zimbabwean females immigrants are forced into prostitution in Botswana.
31. 16/10/04. Botswana Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs buried 12 unclaimed Zimbabwean immigrants bodies that had died in an unexplained circumstances.

32. 1/3/04. Guma-Gumas, borders jumper guides, rob and murder 3 Zimbabwe border jumpers on the banks of the Limpopo River.
33. 12/1/04. 2600 illegal immigrants around the Limpopo farming areas were arrested.
34. Botswana government announces that an estimated 26 717 Zimbabwe immigrants were deported to Zimbabwe in 2004.
35. 8/9/04. Botswana government officially announced the erection of a game-proof high voltage fence of 2.4metres along its 500km border with Zimbabwe creating a 'Gaza Strip' to prevent border jumpers and cattle crossing the border spreading foot and mouth diseases.
36. Zimbabwe female immigrants (fleeing political instability and economic meltdown) sell a "quick "nice time for P50 without condoms making P150 to P400 on a busy night disregarding all HIV/AIDS preventions for their children and husbands back in Zimbabwe.
37. 2003. South African National Defence Forces on patrol on the Limpopo River arrested 50 852 Zimbabwe immigrants/border jumpers in 2004.
38. A young woman now ravaged by a venereal disease, who was a student at Masvingo Technical College, tells of having to sleep with 5 truck drivers to get food and passage into South Africa. But now without any treatment she was recently deported.
39. Botswana Ministry of Labour And Home Affairs buried 12 unclaimed Zimbabwe immigrant bodies that had died in unexplained circumstances.
40. Twenty (20) Zimbabwe National Army deserters in Botswana Dukwa Refugee Camp since July 2003, 500km south of Gaborone.
41. 16/08/04. Undercover investigators have arrested an army captain and four other soldiers in Limpopo for apparently systematically ambushing; stripping, and robbing illegal Zimbabwean immigrants before forcing them swim the crocodile-infested Limpopo River back to Zimbabwe.
42. 29/03/04. Zimbabwean victims of political violence and human rights activists abducted at gunpoint in Johannesburg and brutally assaulted by suspected agents of the Zimbabwean government.
43. Freedom for R800. Illegal immigrants mostly Zimbabweans get freedom from Lindela Holding Centre by paying police and Lindela officials R800 (hard earned)

44. The thought of being sent back to their strife-torn country made several Zimbabwean illegal immigrants jump to death from floors of apartment buildings or commit suicide.
45. Xenophobia—no place here for refugees fleeing the Mugabe regime---the whipping and beating of refugees outside and within home affairs offices. Access into Home Affairs offices is by bribes to officials paid in matchboxes and newspapers.

Humanitarian Organisations cannot afford to turn a blind eye to this multitudinous human suffering imposed deliberately on Zimbabwean immigrants/deportees by the Mugabe tyranny.

It has now become urgent and paramount to address the many dimensions of immigrants- Asylum Seekers vulnerable social manmade disaster. There is also pressing need to address this ever deteriorating social degradation that some old civil societies are pretending not to see and are backsliding defeating the main objective of their creation. Survey has shown that many exiled abroad civil societies seem to be paying lip service to their aims and objectives by failing to deal with such grassroots social disasters and disorders.

The question of deportees is any old story that old civil societies (CSOs) with other stakeholders allowed to worsen in the course of time.

From our survey in South Africa, a lot of unbelievable inhuman treatment takes place during the arrest by the police, detention, and transportation to Lindela Holding Centre and during deportation and have been raised several times by the Churches and the progressive solidarity media but with no action or solution.

An important concern is to find a solution to the chaotic problem, implementable strategies to solve this immigrants-deportees social epidemic, should be based on a broad conception of their social improvement.

ZIPOVA, believes that there is a strong urgent need to mobilise resources to improve the effectiveness implementation of any donor resources channelled for these pirate projects and their auxiliaries. One of the most important reasons that we have learnt is that Aid Funds is most effective when it is monitored, supervised and accounted for. A lot of funds and time have been wasted on conferences, workshops, and drawing boards resolutions. Some civil societies end up doing virtually nothing for the grassroots people they prophecy to assist. There is lack of desire for social alleviation of the poorest sections of the society.

Furthermore it is vital always to ensure that aid in any form reaches the targeted section of the projects in order to fulfil the goals, commitment of any humanitarian organisation (CSO). They should never allow the lives of those immigrants-deportees to be decomposed by bad administration governance. They should be role models in compassion, justice, integrity and humanity. They must never remain silent when they know they are issues to be challenged. This calls for concrete discussions and actions. Concrete humanitarian policies and concrete wills to battle these emergency social impacts that are essential and achievable.

The SA government as a synergy in an implementation of proper immigrants-deportees should be encouraged to be a fully-fledged active partner.

We hope this project paper will assist the Donors to understand this despicable human suffering of the Zimbabwe deportees from the time they are arrested for not having legal papers to stay in the host country, how they are transported to various police cells in “Gumba-kumbas”, treatment by the police and corruption, conditions at Lindela Holding Centre for illegal immigrants. Then transportation conditions either in cattle trucks or train wagons to Messina and Beit-bridge, handover procedures by SA to Zimbabwean migration at Beit-bridge, deportee reception in Zimbabwe.

The SA government is deliberately limiting or rather refusing to give legal documents to Zimbabwean asylum seekers. One can line up for several months at Rosettenville Refugees Reception Office without being issued with the paper. Corruption is rife and to get immediate attendance you have to at least pay R700. The refugees cannot afford the ransom fee, so they prefer to leave the fate of their illegality to God's mercy.

When you are arrested either on the street, at work, in homes, illegal immigrants receive the horrendous wreath of unwritten insults and beatings when you try to reason with the arresting officers. The price of one's freedom is on-the-spot R500 or so, which goes straight to police pockets. Arresting illegal immigrants has become one of the most lucrative businesses amongst the police and Department of Home Affairs.

The so-called Lindela Detention Centre has a capacity of 3 000 inmates for both men and women. Presently it has a population of 6 000 to 8 000 mainly Zimbabweans awaiting deportation. The food is unbelievable poor and dirty. Many detainees have died from food poisoning (prison records and human rights reports prove this) and diarrhoea.

Detainees are beaten to death with no apparent reason. Sexual abuses are common or encouraged by authorities. HIV/AIDS contraction is common. Condoms are rarely supplied. Medical facilities in the centre leave a lot to be desired. South African churches and other humanitarian stakeholders have condemned the inhuman treatment of detainees at Lindele without success. Probably their protest was not good enough. UNHCR with offices nearby is useless and toothless regardless of its abundant funds and manpower. Its personnel are inexperienced and ignorant of any immigrant problems. Detainees have secretly, on many occasions petitioned the officials of UNHCR to make presentations to the SA government for access and permission to take their property and families during the deportation. All this has fallen to deaf ears and sense of duty. South African government should not be blamed as it is always ready to listen and act if persuaded like the current overhauling exercise of Department of Home Affairs.

Every Wednesday is a deportation day or much knows as a ‘Freedom Day’. One meal is saved at 4 am to last one for a journey of 560km----6-7 hours. Button sticks of the police rules the day. Talking and singing is forbidden. Complaints, requests and exercises are out of bounce and leisure. Sick deportees are undoctored. The journey is torturous and hell. Many immigrants and deportees prefer death to this treatment.

The reception in Messina Police Holding Cells almost is the same with no basic health care, little food, no showers, harassment with infamous derogatory insults. Xenophobia crude expressions by the government officials are at its best and incomparable. Like obedient tamed slaves the deportees bear it with a great fearful and hurtful silence. Once again, Zimbabweans immigrants are treated like criminals; murderers by their fellow black South Africans whom they assisted to gain their 10 years freedom. "Kwere Kwere" go back and support your Mugabe, Mugabe is a hero fighting whites imperialism. Why do you run away from him? He has jobs and farms for you. You are lazy and sell-outs because you support MDC and want to sell your country to Blair, Bush and Europeans." The intolerable insults go on and on as though these police and Home Affairs officials are agents of ZANU PF.

After these derogatory competitive insults, deportees are sent to Beitbridge – Zimbabwe side with very little paper work. Half of boarder police, Home Affairs and civil servants are ZANU PF agents planted to track down Zimbabwean deportees they accuse of smear campaign against ZANU PF and its illegitimate government. Most of the accused deportees have disappeared without trace, unknown to their families in Zimbabwe. Most deportees have been robbed of all their last Rands and belongings. There is no proper handover; one file is exchanged. Weary and hungry deportees are sent to artificial gallows of desperation and destitution. At the gallows/police stations, they are dumped and asked randomly, why do you support MDC, which district do you come from and all sorts of political questions. If released, you are told to find your own way to your respective destinations. Food is not provided, no medical check-up examination, no transport funds are provided or any form of social assistance.

Without any form of food and transport sustainability they resort and embark on criminal acrobats in order to survive. Women travellers and ordinary tourists are robbed, mugged, and rapped without mercy. During the night they involuntarily break in different homes in search of food and money to survive. Severe social conditions created by the regime turned these law-abiding citizens into the lives of vagrants and criminals.

The situation is confusing if not abnormal. Because on other hand are freed deportee criminals from South Africa, Secondly there are prospective boarder-jumpers ready to sneak to SA who are robbed sometimes murdered by Guma-Guma guides across the Limpopo, Thirdly there are more worse criminals and murderers, ZANU PF Agents, SA police and army who fake arrests and arrest, rape, harass, rob and force their victims, especially the Zimbabwe border jumpers to cross the crocodile infested Limpopo River to cover their offences. These reports by some border jumpers are shocking because the offenders involved in most cases are SA law enforcement agents. Now the whole border district rein with its Mafia related mobsters whom even Zimbabwe National Army is failing to contain. The prison cells cannot accommodate any more detainees except serious cases

Government officials turn a blind eye to this disorder to continuously keep themselves employed and exploiting, profiteering, monetary wise. It is all a part of a horrific process borne out of the harsh political realities of a failing regime and high unemployment.

This occurrence of social debacle is also manifested around Botswana border. The Botswana Local Chiefs, Defence and other local security officers subject illegal

immigrants to rape, brutality and medieval floggings. Zimbabwe government nearly severed diplomatic relations last year after its ministry officials (mistakenly identified as illegal immigrants) were inhumanely abused and lashed systematically by the Botswana Defence Force before the Plumtree Border Boundary. Thousands and thousands flock to Botswana through its 500km open boundary with Zimbabwe without control. Illegal immigrants are resented for an increase in crime and stealing of local jobs. To defray tension between the two neighbouring states Botswana government is presently erecting a high voltage electric fence (a modern Berlin wall of the Gaza strip) along with its border with Zimbabwe. The fence is seen as an attempt to contain the estimated 125 000 monthly “border jumpers”, to Botswana.

Mission, Goals and Objectives as Recommended by ZIPOVA

1. The South African government must take a leading Role in the campaign against Xenophobia and the acceptance of foreigners
2. Create an immediate government joint venture programme of Zimbabwean Exiled NGOs, Botswana and South African government.
3. Open Asylum Seekers/Refugees Reception Offices at Messina and Botswana Ramaphela border towns.
4. Human Rights Lawyers and relevant Zimbabwe Exiled Civil Societies appoint experienced liaison officers to advise and co-ordinate with respective states Departments of Home Affairs, Police and Defence forces.
5. Interviews of Zimbabwe Political Asylum Seekers/Refugees should be prioritised.
6. That shelter, health care and food facilities be prepared on short-long term readiness.
7. Immigration, army and police on border districts be trained and workshopped on how to deal with refugee repatriation exercises.
8. Seek and avail proper medical treatment for HIV/AIDS affected refugees.
9. Seek means and ways to unite immigrants' deportees and their families and their properties left behind.
10. Request SA ,Botswana governments Donor organisations to fund the pirate projects.
11. Distribution of food parcels and transport fares before deportation to Zimbabwe.
12. Be able to access and determine amongst the detainees/deportees that no genuine political victims are deported before any legal representation.
13. Open of Refugee camps along the Botswana and South Africa borders managed by UNHCR and Zimbabwe Exiled Civil societies.

Conclusion

ZIPOVA feels that during the elections and after election periods there will be an influx of refugees and recommends the establishment of refugee facilities similar to those found in Europe and America.

ZIPOVA is prepared to submit more information on the Xenophobic acts faced by Zimbabweans immigrants should it be invited to do so